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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 002316

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE (FOOKS/STINCHCOMB);
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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - RS MEDIA FOCUSING ON WARTIME PAST, NOT
EURO-ATLANTIC FUTURE

Classified By: Political Counselor Michael J. Murphy for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Over the last year, there has been a steady stream of reporting from Republika Srpska (RS) media about the 1992-1995 war. Almost all of it has focused on alleged crimes and perceived injustices committed against the Serbs, including the post-war "failure" of international and state institutions to bring the perpetrators of these crimes to justice. Facts are often manipulated and statistics exaggerated to make the case that Serbs, too, were victims in the 1992-1995 conflict as well as at other points in their history. This relentless media onslaught keeps old wounds open and RS mindsets planted squarely in the past. It also facilitates efforts by RS politicians to portray current political events as another in a long line of threats to the Serbs and to portray their obstructionism as an attempt to ensure that Serbs will "never again" be victims. This has fueled Serb passions, paranoia and insecurities. It also bodes poorly for long term reconciliation in the region, and for the development of strong, multi-ethnic state institutions, particularly those charged with addressing the legacy of the 1992-1995 war. Serb suffering in Kosovo is also an increasingly prominent theme in the RS media. END SUMMARY.

RS Media,s Renewed Focus on the 92-95 War

12. (SBU) Media based in the Republika Srpska (RS) have maintained a steady barrage of reporting about the 1992-1995 war. In the past year, we have noticed greater emphasis on:

- Anniversaries of alleged wartime "massacres" of Serbs;
- Commemorations for Serb victims of alleged atrocities;
- The management of war crimes cases by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and State Court;
- Testimonials from alleged war crime survivors and family members of the "victims."

These items are a daily part of primetime news broadcasts and RS print media, and they are often supplemented by coverage that harkens back to Serb victims in the world wars.

Us Against the World

13. (C) Perceived grievances against Serbs are a prominent

theme of war-related reporting in the RS. This approach is encouraged by RS officials who regularly attend commemorations for alleged crimes against Serbs, visit and assist survivors or victims, families and make public statements promising to prevent future injustices against Serbs. Commentary on ICTY and State Court cases against alleged Serb war criminals dwells on the perceived anti-Serb bias of both institutions rather than the facts of the cases themselves. More extensive, fact-based RS media coverage of ICTY's and the State Court's work generally occurs only when those on trial are Bosniaks, such as former Army of Bosnia wartime commander Rasim Delic. Acquittals, or what Serbs consider to be "light" sentences for those accused of crimes against Serbs, also receive prominent coverage.

Serbs Were Victims Too

14. (C) The subtext of these media reports is clear: that Serbs were victims too, that justice for Serb victims has not been served, and that these crimes against Serbs could happen again. There is little effort by the RS media to distinguish between scope and scale of the crimes allegedly committed against Serbs and those committed in and around Srebrenica in July 1995 against Bosniaks. More generally, RS media consistently downplay statistics of war crimes committed by Serbs, and often exaggerate the number of Serb civilians killed during the war. The most reliable estimate of wartime deaths comes from the Sarajevo-based Research and Documentation Center (RDC), which puts the total Serb civilian death toll at 3,555; yet at anniversaries of alleged atrocities around the RS, speakers regularly claim that "thousands" of Serb civilians died. Taken collectively,

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these claims would put Serb civilian deaths well above the RDC numbers. RS-based organizations attempting to promote "the truth" about Serb victims are also given prominent coverage.

Digging Up The Past: We Will Never Forget

15. (C) A recent RS government announcement that it would place greater emphasis on commemorating Serb victims of the 1992-1995 war has prompted much, though not all, of the latest coverage by RS media of war-related events. Our impression is that RS media outlets are competing amongst themselves to impress government officials with the extent of their coverage. The main government-backed television station Radio Television RS (RTRS) is the most frequent broadcast offender, but other "private" stations are also under the strong influence of the government and carry similar stories. Private print media outlets also maintain close ties to Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) and show general support for RS government policies.

6.(SBU) The following are a few representative samples demonstrative of the overall media environment

-- (SBU) On July 12, RS media highlighted the annual commemoration of the deaths of 69 Serb soldiers and civilians during 1992 attacks on Serb villages near Bratunac. For several years, this ceremony has been intended as a counterpoint to Bosniak commemoration on July 11 of the genocide committed in neighboring Srebrenica.

-- (SBU) On August 21, RTRS carried a story about a commemoration for Bosniak victims killed at Koricanske Stijene. RS journalists offset the story, however, by inserting quotations from an RS Camp Prisoners Association press release, urging a maximum penalty for ICTY indictee Bosniak General Rasim Delic for crimes against Serbs.

-- (SBU) On September 17, RTRS opened its main evening news

with sensational wartime footage containing explicit scenes of the execution of Serb POWs and the bodies of Serb victims. The footage included parts of a speech by the Zavidovici Imam to a Mujaheddin unit, and purported to demonstrate that "Mujaheddins" were part of the chain of command of the BiH army.

-- (SBU) The same September 17 RTRS news broadcast continued with two additional stories about Serb victims. The first reported on the death of 16 Serb civilians killed by "Croat-Muslim forces" in the RS village of Serdari in 1992. The story included quotations from the RS Association of War Veterans, whose leaders announced that they are unsatisfied with the lack of indictments for this crime. The second story covered the anniversary of a 1995 action by the Croatian regular army during which more than 100 RS soldiers and civilians were killed.

-- (SBU) On September 18, the RS print media followed suit, with Glas Srpske carrying a cover story headlined, "Let the Criminals be Punished" accompanied by a large photo of late RS President Milan Jelic placing a wreath on the memorial cross for Serb victims. The article carried his quotation: "We have to forgive, because it is in a manner of Christianity, but we will not forget, because we do not want to allow the repetition of this evil." On the same page, Glas implicitly linked the story about Serb war victims with ongoing police reform negotiations by prominently including the quote that "Jelic stressed that the RS was ready to make reforms, but it was not ready to accept reforms that will destroy the RS, because the Serb people have no alternatives."

-- (SBU) On October 10, RS media blanketed the airways with live coverage of memorial events in Mrkonjic Grad, in Western Krajina, on the anniversary of the death of what Serbs claim was several thousand Serbs in October 1995. Dodik and numerous other RS politicians attended the commemorations. Glas Srpske ran a cover story titled, "Indictments Warm Drawers," implying that legal prosecutions in these cases are stalled.

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